

BRUSH UP YOUR WEBSTER'S

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From time to time in Word Ways we have seen logological word-play illustrated from a bewildering variety of sources. In this article we propose to show that one need not always look in arcane and esoteric references to prove one's point. Why not turn first to the major U.S. dictionary, Webster's Third New International? In particular, we see little if any need for referring to obsolete dictionaries, such as Webster's Second (which only invites Webster's First, which invites who-knows-what), nor to specialized once-only publications. We don't object to these less authoritative works -- we simply wish to point out that these other references should only be considered secondary and back-up. Naturally, other contemporary dictionaries may be used; but in the U.S. at least, Webster's Third is usually considered the prime authority.

We do not intend to pick on any author. On the other hand, readers may wish to revise their copies of Word Ways. Accordingly, we shall refer to previous issues only as Volume-Page: e.g. 3-107 will refer to Vol. 3, Page 107 (May 1970).

This article will not just comment on previous articles. We also intend to amaze and amuse you with items of Websterian curiosa. And don't think that you, dear reader, may not think. Here and there we shall present problems for you to solve. We may, or may not, give our version of the answer in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

Ordinarily we shall make little distinction among single compact words, hyphenated words, and dictionary entries. To satisfy the most readers, however, we shall attempt to illustrate our points using the best of all three types, letting the reader choose the level he prefers.

From A To Z

The first word is A, on page 1. The last word is ZYZZOGETON, on page 2662. Since Webster's Third was first published in 1961, G. & C. Merriam Co. regularly publishes an Addenda section to update the dictionary. The 1971 printing has entries A to ZORI on pages

57a to 72a. When referring to words from this section we shall append an asterisk to indicate a new word: e.g., MOONWALK*.

The letters AB from a two-letter word. The digram YZ we have just illustrated with the last word. But better known, 2-220, is SY-ZYGY. The trigram ABC is in DABCHICK and ABCOULOMB, 2-168, but there is a far simpler example.

QUIZ 1: It is?

For an XYZ trigram, there is no example in 2-270. However, it exists in HYDROXYZINE.

Letter Strings

For the use of alphabetically adjacent letters, the string WXYZ was considered impossible in 4-11. The longer string WXYZA was illustrated with a coined word in 4-144. Both these problems are simultaneously solved with WAXY MAIZE (note that this fills a blank in 4-208, for WXYZ are in alphabetical order). For the six letters XYZABC we know not a single word, but we can extend it to XYZABCDE with the entry HYDROXYBENZOIC ACID. The very rare and obsolete QUERPOS, 4-144, may be replaced with QUAESTORSHIP having the seven-string OPQRSTU. Some examples of the eight-string NOPQRSTU are PERQUISITION, PROPINQUITIES, QUADRIPARTITIONS and QUADRUPLICATIONS.

QUIZ 2: Is there a string longer than eight?

Multiletters

The longest word containing all different letters is the 15-letter isogram DERMATOGLYPHICS, 2-64. You know, don't you, that there is no such word as UNCOPYRIGHTABLE, 1-256, or its assumed substantival plural? If one allows repeated letters there are 18 different letters in AZIMUTHAL EQUIDISTANT PROJECTION. Be sure to file this with words having three of the four least common letters, JQXZ, 1-69 and 3-180.

QUIZ 3: Notice anything?

QUIZ 4: Is there an entry with 19 or more different letters?

Repeated Letters

What word has the most letters? Clearly it is our old favorite PNEUMONULTRAMICROSCOPICSILICOVOLCANOCONIOSIS. (Because G. & C. Merriam is constantly deluged with the question, this

extremely rare word appears in the latest Collegiates.) Did you ever consider that the most common letter is E, but this word has only one? Look sharp! It has six C's and nine O's. This is matched by the nine-S word POSSESSIONLESSNESSES and by HUMUHUMUNUKUNUKU-APUAA with nine U's. There are only six A's in TATHAGATAGARBHA, but two more than the four in MAHARAJA, 2-53. In 3-252 we saw some examples of words (some from questionable sources) having five of each letter. Who will compile a complete and authoritative longest alphabetical list? We shall give a few hints below.

QUIZ 5: What is a shorter word than RAZZMATAZZ with 4 Z's?

For alternating monotonies, 4-77, one can add the 3-Y POLYGY-NY. There is a 6-A in PANAMA BALATA.

Single Letters

Each letter of the alphabet is a word. All are nouns; a few are also other parts of speech. Did you know U* is an adjective? It means "upper class". We wonder if the comparative is UER or UIER, or just simply MORE U.

QUIZ 6: Name a single letter verb not derived from an abbr.

The question of isolated letters has been studied in depth, 4-100. For final letters, the list was marred by JOHN Q., with a period. This need not have been, for there is COENZYME Q* in the Addenda. Central isolated letters are rare. With a little thought you should be able to think of the most common central letter.

QUIZ 7: It is?

Strangely, the second most common is X in AUSTRALIAN X ENCEPHALITIS, CHARACTERISTIC X RAYS, POTATO X VIRUS and VIRUS X DISEASE.

Unusual Letter Combinations

There are many words containing strange combinations of letters. We have mentioned ACHACH in STOMACHACHE, 4-52. An easy one is IGI, for it's a word. A toughie is OLOLO, in DIABOLOLOGY. Most strange indeed are CHSSCH in LACHSSCHINKEN and SCHSCH in ESCHSCHOLTZIA. Most everyone knows ISSISSI is in MISSISSIPPI and derived words. Many would bet there is no other word. But there is: FORTISSISSIMO.

QUIZ 8: What words contain LLABALL, OOTSTOO, YSPEPSY?

The next time you wake up in the middle of the night screaming, don't worry. You have thought of two words of the form -ARD--ARD-.

QUIZ 9: Where is FZBDE?

Reduplications

A pure reduplication repeats the first half in the second half, e.g. BANG-BANG. The longest is PER SECOND PER SECOND, 1-142. The longest hyphenated reduplication is BUMPITY-BUMPITY. The longest compact word is a tie between CHIQUICHIQUI (PALM) and TANGANTANGAN. Note this last has a double reduplication, since each half itself contains a double AN. Another example of this type is ALGAL-ALGAL. The perfect KUKUKUKU, 1-142, gets top honors. Did you know that TIKITIKI is used to cure BERIBERI?

QUIZ 10: What are the four reduplications involving numbers?

Heads 'N Tails Words

A reduplication having an extraneous central letter, e.g. HOT-SHOT, has been studied four times: 1-129, 3-48, 3-107 and 4-132. People have been thinking small, for the first mention queried if a repeated four-letter grouping existed regardless of the number of central letters. (Someone should have cried ABRACADABRA!) For one central letter, the two 4-ers given later are OUTSCOUTS and OUT-SPOUTS. We offer, in alphabetical order for the central letter, some examples longer than those given before: BIBLIA ABIBLIA, ARGY-BARGY, OVERCOVER, RIVER DRIVER, MALARIAE MALARIA, AIRY-FAIRY, TRINISTRIN, TARANTARA, CONVEXO-CONVEX, WHAT'S WHAT, ARSY-VARSY, CALYCAL and finally the very obvious, but missed, EIGHTY-EIGHT.

For the extra letter at the start, there are AHOLEHOLE, OPA-KAPAKA, PACKSACKS and HANDY-ANDY, but KINNIKINNIK is by far the longest. The latter word ties MICROMICRON for the longest word with an extra final letter. But don't miss the fantastic dictionary entry with three repeated letter-groups: GRUGRU GRUB.

Super Heads 'N Tails Words

With more than one extraneous letter, UNDERGROUNDER in 2-168 is still the longest of the single compact words. The subject was expanded in 4-170, but using outside references except for the earlier-mentioned CONVEXO-CONVEX.

Let's first consider two central letters. There's (FROM)

STRENGTH TO STRENGTH and SHOULDER TO SHOULDER as eighters, WAREHOUSE-TO-WAREHOUSE (INSURANCE) as a niner, and the longest is PLEASANTNESS-UNPLEASANTNESS.

For the two letters at the start, there is SPRING RING. At the end we can do better with COUSCOUSES and OPERA OPERATA, as well as a variant spelling of an earlier word: KINNIKINNICK.

For three extraneous central letters, there's BLANKETY-BLANK, CLICKETY-CLICK, etc., but the longest is THROUGH-AND-THROUGH. For a starter, we find SIX-THREE-THREE; for an ender, take your choice among BACKBACKIRI, CROSS-CROSSLET and SCIENTIA SCIENTIARUM.

If we insist a repeated letter grouping must be at least four letters long to qualify, the longest words containing reduplications are ANHYDROHYDROXYPROGESTERONE, HYPERGLYCEMIC-GLYCOGENOLYTIC (FACTOR), and TRINITROPHENYLMETHYLNITRAMINE.

If we say that a grouping must be at least seven letters long, then the only words not mentioned so far are ANTIMISSILE MISSILE*, QUARTERLY QUARTERED, TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE, and COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEES.

Pair Isograms

A different type of repetition is the double use of a set of letters in scrambled form, 1-201: e.g. TEAMMATE. Known tenners are the five words ARRAIGNING, HORSESHOER, INTESTINES, TESSELLATA and TROMOMETER. Has no one noticed CONCISIONS, INSCIENCES, MA'AMSELLES, NOTIONISTS, RETARDATED, SWING WINGS and TOOLSTEELS?

The next level has two examples, 4-142: CICADELLIDAE and HAPPENCHANCE. Many word pair entries come close to matching these. OPPOSITE TIDES has an unwanted D, and unfortunately Webster's fails to list either OPPOSITE TIES or OPPOSITE SITE. A few reduplications satisfy the unscrambled arrangement: BARONG-BARONG, HOUSEY-HOUSEY, HOUSIE-HOUSIE, TINGLE-TINGLE.

The next plateau, of fourteen letters, is exceedingly difficult. There is only one reduplication having seven different letters used twice: BUMPITY-BUMPITY. There are entries that come close: PAINTED TERRAPIN, extra D; PLICAE POLONICAE, extra N; and TROPICAL APRICOT, extra L.

There is only one trio isogram -- DEEDED -- in Webster's Third. PEPPERER and SUSURRUS, both missing an extra R, are near-triple trios. We can come close to a quadruple trio with TREE ROOT ROT, missing an E.

Pyramid Words

Sets of words using an increasingly larger number of each new letter are pyramid words, 3-109. For example, A, ZOO, SEEDED and REMEMBERER have 1, 122, 122333 and 1223334444 for their letter frequencies. Two new words in the last category are DISSEISEES and SASSANIANS.

The pair equivalent of pyramid words is a new subject. The first two members are easy to exemplify: ME and LETTER have forms (2)1 and (2)122. The complexity increases rapidly. For (2)122333 we offer for your amazement three examples: TURRET TUNERS, WOOD SWALLOWS, and the American elk WAWASKEESHES.

More Letter Usage

Many people believe the longest word formed from letters in the first half of the alphabet is DIDDLE-DADDLED or similar 13-letter words.

QUIZ 11: Notice anything?

However, the real champion has fourteen letters. If we told you it was the name of the witch hazel family, it might help a small bit. We don't offer much more help by telling you it has the form -A-A-E-I-A-E-E. The missing letters are taken from ACDHLMN.

QUIZ 12: It is?

There are many short words not containing a vowel, e.g. NTH and STPS*. Four 7-letter words having only one vowel were in 1-138. Here are some 8-letter examples: SCHMALTZ, SCHNAPPS, TWELFTHS and the new words SCHLOCKS* and SHTICKS*. The word with the most letters for only one vowel is STRENGTHS. For the part-time vowel Y, the longest is RHYTHMS. For the rare vowel W, there is CRWTHS. For a non-vowel word pronounced with one syllable, there's RHMS.

Word Sounds

Did you know, despite the efforts in 3-79 and 3-148, there is another 2-syllable word of thirteen letters: BREASTSTROKES. And, de-

spite 3-109 and 3-173, there is a second word of ten letters pronounced with one syllable: SCRAUNCHED.

Don't bother trying to keep up with 3-letter 3-syllable and 4-letter 4-syllable words; the latest Addenda is loaded with them. DMT*, DON*, EPN*, LSD*, THC*, DDVP* and DMSO* are all legitimate words, not abbreviations.

While on the subject of the sounds of words, there are three examples of OLD being pronounced 'h'. Two of them are ONE OLD CAT and TWO OLD CAT.

QUIZ 13: What is the third?

QUIZ 14: How do you pronounce MOO?

Hidden Words

Many words are difficult to near impossible to find for one or another reason. There are apparently no instances in Webster's Third of words placed out of alphabetical order by mistake, 4-8. There are, however, words placed out of order on purpose. In fact, there are sixteen out of order words in a row.

QUIZ 15: Why?

A second reason for not being able to find words easily is that there are alternate and inflectional forms, not having separate entries. For example, TIPPIT is not between TIPPING and TIPPLE, for it is an alternate form given under TIP=IT. The earlier-mentioned OPERA OPERATA is hidden under OPUS OPERATUM. The most widely separated of non-entries of this form is AL 'UBAID, found only after UBAID and not 1.3 columnar miles away, between ALTUS and ALUCHI RESIN. The most widely-separated that is given is AMAKOSA, plural of XHOSA.

A third reason for hidden words is that they are short words buried alphabetically among long words. For example, there is no SUL, only the prefix SUL-, between SUKUMA and SULA. The word exists only in SUL PONTICELLO and SUL TASTO. An example of a word fitting both these last two categories is REPRO. There is no separate entry in alphabetical order. It occurs in REPRO PROOF, where it is given also as a single word alternate.

A fourth reason the sought-for word is hard to find is that it is not the initial word in a multi-word phrase. The simple word OVO is not next to the entry OVO-, but in AB OVO and IN OVO. For words of this type there are about five 2-letter words, thirty 3-letter words,

and eighty-five 4-letter words. An interesting 6-letter hidden word is ANAANA, from the combination KAHUNA ANAANA.

QUIZ 16: Are you paying attention?

What is the longest word of this type? Could it be FLEXIBILITAS under CEREAL? No. EXTRAORDINARIUM under CRIMEN? No. It is the 18-letter THYMICOLYMPHATICUS under STATUS.

QUIZ 17: Where is the combination of 2GT?

Inflectional Forms

One may form a plural in many different ways. We have seen in 3-195 and 4-19 plurals formed by adding letters to the singular. Missing was the example of UNIO which may add NIDES to give UNIONIDES. We were advised not to mix up alternate singulars with alternate plurals. Yet Webster's gives "SYNC also SYNCH, -S" as well as the separate entry "SYNCHS, pl of SYNC". Thus, Pandora was right, and SYNC adds HS to give the plural SYNCHS.

Past tenses are usually formed by adding ED; yet THEE adds 'D.

QUIZ 18: Do you know a common word not ending in D that may add DED for the past tense?

Some words may add T, as BURN, MIX, SPOIL and STEP. More rare is to add IT: KIRK to KIRKIT and SKELP to SKELPIT. Several words have a number of alternate pasts. BURN, DRIVE and GIVE, for example, have four alternates each. STEAL has four alternate past participles. BE is too confusing to consider. The verb with the most pasts is HEAR -- having HEARD also HEARED or HEERD or HEERED or HEARN or HEERN for past or past participle.

Alternates

Just above, we saw alternate past tenses. Plurals are more accommodating. For a given plural, what is the most alternate singulars? In 3-201, five was the claim. Yet the champion is really CLARSAICH (small harps) with six singulars: CLARSACH, CLARSEACH, CLARSETH, CLARSECH, CLARSHECH, CLAIRSCHACH.

Relatedly, the largest number of explicit singulars and plurals, 3-201, for a single entry is not 15 as claimed, but 16. Please check HAFTARAH for the whole list.

Strange Characters

To illustrate unusual typewriter characters illustrated by dictionary entries, an article in 4-152 claimed to have covered Webster's Third completely. Missed, however, were a double apostrophe in 'A', a single comma in WILL I, NILL I (and related terms), a single modified O in STØD, and parentheses in KEEP (ONE) COMPANY. To be current, moreover, see the Addenda for a strange use of the period in POLY I. POLY C*, another A-with-a-ring in BOKMÅL, a virgule in V/STOL*, and the new character, a colon in POLY I: C*.

QUIZ 19: The bold face combination 8 EIGHTS appears. Why?

Old & New

Try as they will, the editors of Webster's cannot keep up with the language. They add words that immediately become obsolete (see the Addenda for more surfing terms than you thought possible) and fail to add words that are in widespread common use. RABBIT EARS has been mentioned in 4-25 as an entry without the expected meaning. Other examples are LONG COUNT, NECKING, SCREW UP, SMOKE POT and WATER BED. While we knew the term BLACK BOX as "an enclosed electrical device" well over ten years before the Third was published in 1961, the only definition given was "Australian eucalypt". We're happy to report that this one oversight, at least, has been cleared up in the Addenda, although more than 20 years late.

Final Corrections

While you are correcting the dictionary, 1-235 and 4-8, be sure to correct the entry QUADRANT, which appears (in our copy anyway) as QUAD RANT without a raised dot to indicate the syllabification. The chemical DIMETHYLSULFOXIDE* should be spelled as two words by approved chemical nomenclature rules: DIMETHYL SULFOXIDE. Finally, Definition 1 under the noun UP AND DOWN has UPS AND DOWNS in italics instead of bold face.

QUIZ 20: One page of text in the main body does not have a single bold face entry. Why?

Conclusion

So, readers of Word Ways, brush up your Webster's.